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Carol X Weakley 11/13/2006 04:07:51 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 004481

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2011  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [KPAL](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAELI REGIONAL EXPERTS SHARE VIEWS ON IRAN,  
SYRIA, IRAQ WITH DNI NEGROPONTE

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: During his recent visit to Israel, the Ambassador hosted a dinner at which DNI Negroponte asked a diverse group of Israeli experts to share their views on Iran, particularly Israeli perspectives on the intentions of the Iranian leadership. The DNI also solicited views on the possible impact of sanctions on the Iranian regime and population. The Israeli experts recommended dialogue with Iran as well as sanctions on petroleum derivatives backed by the threat of force, delinking Syria from Iran, and confronting the Iranian nuclear challenge. They offered general ideas that Israeli and U.S. officials could pursue to confront the Iranian regime, including a reappraisal of the Arab Peace Initiative, which some Israelis viewed as a sign that Arab fear of Iranian aspirations for hegemony in the Middle East may make the Arabs more inclined to settle the dispute with Israel. End Summary.

DIALOGUE WITH IRAN: CALL THEIR BLUFF

12. (C) Nearly all the Israeli academics invited to meet with DNI Negroponte recommended that the U.S. express a willingness to engage in dialogue with Iran. Tel Aviv University (TAU) Iran expert, David Menashri, advocated dialogue "without illusions of progress" so as to "take away the argument that the U.S. isn't in favor of dialogue." Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Professor (and former Netanyahu advisor) Uzi Arad said that openness to dialogue would represent a "carrot," but he stressed that the U.S. would also require sticks, including the threat of force as the necessary "or else" factor in U.S.-Iranian relations. In Arad's view, "sanctions won't do." Arad continued: "the more you demonstrate that you are prepared to use force, the less likely you will have to use it." While concurring that the prospect of (foreign) destabilization of Iran might serve

as a stick in negotiations with Iran, Yossi Alpher of the Bitter Lemons webzine cautioned against a U.S. (or Israeli) role in fomenting destabilization in Iraq. Recalling his experience as the Mossad desk officer for Iran at the time of the 1978 revolution, Alpher indicated he is now convinced of the stability of the Iranian regime. He cautioned "You can't negotiate with Iran and try to topple it at the same time." Arad predicted that Iran would follow the DPRK example and try to preserve all its options and would cheat to do so.

#### DELINK SYRIA FROM IRAN

13. (C) Tel Aviv University President (and former Israeli Ambassador to Washington) Itamar Rabinovitch recommended removing Syria from the Iranian axis via negotiations. Alpher said it could be done "militarily or diplomatically." Ze'ev Schiff, the Haaretz military affairs correspondent, urged dialogue with Syria to make it a "buffer," and emphasized that it is a "mistake not to engage Syria." Alpher added that the U.S. and Israel should approach the Syrians together, rather than have Israel go it alone. Alpher and others noted that Israel would have to be prepared to put the Golan Heights on the bargaining table, and stressed that if the Alawite regime in Damascus were toppled, Israel might be in bigger trouble because the successor regime would be dominated by Sunni Islamists. Menashri downplayed the importance of Syria, however, saying, "Syria won't solve (the Iranian) problem. Focus on Palestine, so Ahmadinejad cannot use the issue to mobilize the Iranian people."

#### IRANIAN AMBITION: REGIONAL HEGEMONY

14. (C) In 15-20 years, there will be two major powers in the Middle East: Israel and Iran, according to Giora Romm, a former Israeli defense attach in Washington and current director of the America Forum at TAU, who contrasted the relative stability of Iran, a national power, with that of a fractured Iraq, which was, in his view, heading toward a Yugoslavia-style meltdown. The consensus of the Israeli academics and regional experts was that the Iranian regime sought to obtain nuclear weapons, establish predominant influence in southern Iraq and the Gulf, and force the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq. Iran's leadership wants to be the regional hegemon that deals with the U.S. (on behalf of the Middle East, or the Islamic world generally) -- in a reprise of the role Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt sought to play in the 1960's. In response to the DNI's question about Iranian leadership, Menashri postulated that former President Khatemi had done more than Ahmadinejad to preserve the Iranian regime by putting forward a moderate face. "Ahmadinejad endangers the regime, but (his outlandish behavior) has had the effect of making Khamenei appear good and rational (by contrast)."

#### IRAN/IRAQ

15. (C) Iran's aims in Iraq are a "zero-sum" game: to see U.S. forces withdrawn and humiliated while preserving Iranian national security objectives in Baghdad and the south, according to Haifa University's Amatzia Baram and Ephraim Kam of TAU's Jaffee Center. However, "Iranian fear of anarchy in Iraq tames their anti-Americanism (in this arena)," Hillel Frisch of Bar Ilan University (BIU) qualified. As an expert on the Iraqi Shi'a, Baram opined that Moqtada Al-Sadr is the most powerful figure in Iraq: "He will be the next dictator of Shi'a Iraq." Baram recommended that the U.S. "be creative with Sadr, as he is anti-Iranian." Baram also suggested that a UNIFIL-like observer mission deployed along Iraq's borders with Iran (and Syria) could help deter Iranian and Syrian meddling in Iraq. Baram opined that such a presence combined with a regular reporting requirement to the UN Security Council would be more effective in containing threats to Iraq from Iran and Syria than additional U.S. forces in Iraq.

#### IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT TIMELINE; SANCTIONS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

16. (C) DNI Negroponte laid out U.S. views on the possible timeframe (2010-15) for Iranian development of a nuclear

weapon capability. Ret. MG Giora Eiland, formerly Israel's National Security Advisor and currently a resident scholar at TAU, responded that critical benchmarks in this process would occur earlier than 2010. In response to a question from the DNI regarding whether sanctions would unify or challenge the Iranian regime, Baram replied that sanctions focused on petroleum derivatives (i.e., refined petroleum products) could have an impact of turning the Iranian people against the regime. Baram, however, acknowledged the possibility that sanctions could also have the opposite effect of unifying the Iranian people behind the regime, a point made by Shimon Shamir, a former Israeli ambassador to Egypt and Jordan who now runs the TAU Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation.

#### CHALLENGES FACING ISRAEL

17. (C) Ambassador Jones asked how Israel might take advantage of the Arab perception of the Iranian threat to advance its objectives in the Middle East. The Israeli academics proposed several ideas that they believed their government should consider, without offering many details on how the GOI or USG could advance them:

-- Israel's challenge is to resolve the Palestinian problem, according to Romm. Menashri added that the Palestinian problem is the only Arab-Israeli issue that the Iranians are able to exploit domestically and throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

-- As a corollary, Romm added that Israelis must define Israeli nationalism -- particularly vis-a-vis the 20 percent Arab population of Israel. TAU Professor Elie Rekhess, an expert on the Israeli Arab minority, warned that Iran had made inroads in the occupied territories via the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as well as within the Islamic movement in Israel.

-- The Arab Peace Initiative (Beirut Arab Summit of 2002) is a manifestation of Arab concern about the rise of Iranian influence, according to Shamir, who commented: "It is a much better document than the Palestinian prisoners' document." Alpher added that the U.S. should tell the Arabs to approach the Israelis with this -- rather than seek to impose it (via the UN). (Note: Israeli officials often express opposition to engaging on the basis of the Arab Peace Plan because of the Plan's references to resolving the Palestinian refugee problem. End Note.)

-- Preserving Iraqi Kurdistan remains an important Israeli interest -- as the only non-Arab entity, other than Israel, to emerge in the Arab world, according to Alpher. Kam noted that the Kurdish question was one facing Iran as well as Iraq.

-- Iran's weakness is Ahmadinejad's failure to deliver on his promises to disillusioned Iranian youth (and minorities), according to Menashri, who doubted that the Iranian President's anti-Israel rhetoric would appease them. Menashri recommended that the West "give Iranian youth hope," for they are the potential revolutionaries capable of toppling the regime. Alpher was less sanguine about prospects for change from within, and commented that "For thirty years you've said the Iranian system has ethnic cracks, but I believe the regime to be fairly solid."

18. (C) Israeli Minister of Transportation, Shaul Mofaz, who was born in Iran and who is responsible for Israel's strategic dialogue with the U.S. government, commented that it would take a generation to change Iranian ideas. Meanwhile, Iranian inroads with the Palestinians would continue (citing the recent visit of a Palestinian minister to Tehran).

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You can also access this site through the State Department's  
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